DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 970 RC 022 743

TITLE	[Rural School Administrator's Resources.]
INSTITUTION	AEL, Inc., Charleston, WV.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	55p.; For the Rural Education Directory: Organizations and Resources, 2001; see RC 022 716.
CONTRACT	RJ96006001
AVAILABLE FROM	AEL, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348. Tel: 304-347-0400; Tel: 800-624-9120 (Toll Free). Available as part of the Rural School Administrators' Resource Kit, which includes the Rural Education Directory: Organizations and Resources, 2001 ($20).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Check Lists; Community Involvement; *Community Resources; *Educational Facilities Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; *Parent Participation; Prevention; Questionnaires; *Rural Schools; School Administration; *School Community Relationship; *School Safety; Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Asset Mapping

ABSTRACT

This packet contains resources on five topics relevant to rural school administrators. "Assessing Parent Involvement: A Checklist for Rural Schools": discusses educator beliefs that support successful parent engagement programs, challenges and advantages of rural schools attempting to involve parents and community, and aspects of successful programs; lists 10 Web sites providing parent involvement resources; and presents a 12-item checklist to assess parent involvement. "Community Asset Mapping" discusses: the importance of mapping community strengths and resources; steps in creating an asset map; and suggestions for generating a community profile, completing a community capacity inventory, and conducting a "windshield survey." "Community Engagement: An Inventory": briefly reviews research findings with practical implications for community engagement; describes four relevant resource centers; and presents the five-part Community Engagement Inventory. "Creating Safer Rural Schools: Involving the Community" discusses: risk factors for school violence; guidelines for creating a community team to plan school safety, identifying areas for action inside and outside the school, and planning for a crisis; and two recommended books. Two checklists cover: school policies and procedures to prevent violence; and physical features of the school building and campus. "Rural School Facilities Planning Process: A Checklist" presents a checklist that focuses on: gathering information before planning begins; designing a rural school to accommodate curricular and extracurricular activities; and planning a facility that engages the community. Six relevant books and organizations are listed. (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 448 970

[Rural School Administrators' Resources]

AEL, Inc.
Charleston, West Virginia

2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC022743

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Assessing Parent Involvement: A Checklist for Rural Schools

Community Asset Mapping

Community Engagement: An Inventory

Creating Safer Rural Schools: Involving the Community

Rural School Facilities Planning Process: A Checklist

Resource

Rural School Administrator's

Assessing Parent Involvement: A Checklist for Rural Schools

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Assessing Parent Involvement: A Checklist for Rural Schools

Research shows that students learn more and feel better about school when parents are involved in their education. Moreover, involved parents tend to feel better about public education and are more likely to support local schools. While it was once considered primarily the parents' responsibility to become active partners in their children's schooling, new research suggests that schools need to actively encourage parents. They need to make parents feel welcome at school and to make special efforts to include hard-to-reach parents.

Most successful parent engagement programs are based on six basic beliefs:

1. All families have strengths.
2. Parents can learn new techniques.
3. Parents have important perspectives about their children.
4. Most parents really care about their children.
5. Cultural differences are both valid and valuable.
6. Many family forms exist and are legitimate.

The presence of these beliefs among teachers and administrators helps schools establish a climate of openness and mutual respect in which parents feel comfortable and welcome.

Because many rural schools are geographically isolated and short on resources, they face special challenges when it comes to getting parents more involved. Yet these schools often have other factors working in their favor. For example, schools in rural areas often serve as community centers where local people gather for sporting events, celebrations, or special programs. Administrators and teachers tend to know and understand rural people and their concerns. Rural schools that are small can allow for more personal attention.

Parent involvement programs for rural schools work best when they draw upon a community's particular culture and resources, allow parents to share their talents, and show students the connections between their studies and success in their community. As teachers and principals design parent support and outreach programs, they might need to give special attention to the needs of minority and low-income parents, who often have a lower level of involvement with the school.

Listed below are some Internet resources that provide helpful information for anyone developing a parent involvement program. The checklist that follows will help you assess the way your school approaches parent involvement. The checklist highlights successful approaches to parent engagement in rural schools. Completing it will give you an idea of the strengths and weaknesses at your school. This will help you identify goals for improvement as well as areas of success.

Resources

The following Web resources may be helpful in designing a parent engagement policy.

Increasing Parental Involvement: A Key to Student Achievement
http://www.mcrel.org/resources/noteworthy/danj.asp

Partners in Learning: How Schools Can Support Family Involvement in Education
http://ws1.kidscource.com/kidscource/content/schools_involvement.html

The Parent Institute
http://www.par-inst.com/

Critical Issue: Supporting Ways Parents and Families Can Become Involved in Schools
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa100.htm

Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level
http://www.middleweb.com/ParntInvl.html

Parent Involvement in Education
http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu6.html

50 Simple Things You Can Do
gopher://gopher.ed.gov:10001/00/initiatives/family/50things

Education and Parental Involvement in Secondary Schools: Problems, Solutions, and Effects
http://www.valdosta.peachnet.edu/~whuitt/psy702/files/parinvol.txt

Project Appleseed
http://www.a-zuc.com/org/apples/

National Parent Teacher Association's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs
http://www.pta.org/programs

Checklist
Assessing Parent Involvement

1. **Is there parent involvement in school sports programs?**
   ___ Yes ___No

2. **Is there parent involvement in scholastic programs?**
   ____ academics
   ____ band
   ____ home economics
   ____ vocational agriculture
   ____ choir
   ____ drama
   ____ other

3. **Are parents involved in teacher support?**
   ____ classroom volunteers
   ____ office volunteers
   ____ library volunteers
   ____ playground volunteers
   ____ lunchtime volunteers
   ____ field trip volunteers
   ____ school store volunteers
   ____ other volunteers with specialized skills or knowledge

4. **Do parents help with any of the school communication networks?**
   ____ progress reports
   ____ newsletters
   ____ phone tree
   ____ home visits
   ____ parent conferences
   ____ brochures
   ____ school paper
   ____ speakers bureau
   ____ displays in the community
   ____ coffee chats in homes
   ____ coffee chats in school
   ____ language translators
   ____ parent-student pick-up for report cards
   ____ activities calendar
   ____ program reform, policies, and transitions

5. **Does your school do any of the following to encourage parent involvement?**
   - ____ have a formal volunteer program
   - ____ use informal volunteers
   - ____ provide for advisory and decision-making roles for parents
   - ____ have a parent involvement pledge
   - ____ have a parent center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources
   - ____ have a schoolwide homework policy in place
   - ____ routinely seek parents' perspectives about student goals and behavior
   - ____ provide clearly marked visitor parking spaces?
   - ____ have welcoming signs directing parents to the school office?

6. **Does your school make a special effort to include parents with different backgrounds?**
   - ____ the school makes an effort to be welcoming to all parents
   - ____ the school makes a special effort to reach out to parents who may be intimidated by the school
   - ____ school personnel are given training in how to work with parents from different cultural and economic backgrounds
   - ____ school news is communicated not just through written newsletters and bulletins but also through a phone hotline so that those with low literacy skills have equal access to information

7. **Is your school sensitive to the needs of parents with language barriers and other barriers? Does your school do any of the following?**
   - ____ make an effort to involve culturally diverse parents
   - ____ erect visitor parking signs and other signs in local families' second and third most-used languages as well as English
   - ____ release school notices written in the second and third most-used languages as well as English
   - ____ have voice-mail messages in many languages so that all parents can call in for information and homework assignments
   - ____ organize a mentoring system for migrant and immigrant parents
   - ____ make efforts to contact parents who have difficulty reading

8. **Does your school offer any of the following parent support programs?**
   - ____ parenting classes
   - ____ classes on how to help with homework
   - ____ college prep programs
   - ____ training for decision making
   - ____ goal setting for families
   - ____ other workshops for parents
   - ____ family nights
   - ____ transportation
   - ____ home visits
   - ____ child care
   - ____ videotapes, parenting material

9. **What kind of decision-making and advocacy programs are available and open to parents at your school?**

____ PTA/PTO
____ school improvement council
____ textbook adoption advisory council
____ curriculum development advisory council
____ other advisory councils
____ district-level councils and committees
____ other committees
____ advocacy groups
____ assessment of need through parent support survey

10. **Does the staff at your school receive professional development on how to interact successfully with parents? Does your school have professional development programs that address any of the following topics?**

____ involving parents
____ using parents as volunteers
____ recruiting parents
____ communicating with parents
____ being comfortable with parents

11. **Does your school have a policy on parent involvement? Does your school have a director for parent volunteers?**

____ policy on parent involvement
____ person assigned to direct and coordinate parent involvement efforts
____ parent involvement handbook for teachers
____ parent involvement handbook for parents

12. **Does your school's philosophy of parent involvement include the following?**

____ a belief that parent involvement is strongly related to student achievement
____ a belief that schools need to reach out to *all* parents, including those with language barriers
____ a belief that schools should communicate positive messages to parents ("things are going well"), not reserving contact with parents for those times when something goes wrong
____ a belief that communication with parents should be a two-way street
____ a belief that the entire community contributes to each child's growth and education
____ a belief that it is important to adopt an attitude of partnership, to avoid assigning blame, and to focus on what is best for the student

Resource

Rural School Administrator's

Community Asset Mapping

Community Asset Mapping

Community asset mapping will help you define your community, determine what assets are available to help improve local education and quality of life, and help match needs and assets. The first step–defining a rural school community–requires planners to think beyond just the school district. You must also consider where people work, shop, go to church, and go to relax. Consider a reasonable area of daily travel and commerce by parents of school children. If you are dealing with an elementary school, where do those children attend high school and work after graduation? Asking these questions will help determine what your community looks like.

What Research Says

While the tradition of close relationships between rural schools and communities has deep roots,[1] the forces of economic globalization, school consolidation, and teacher and administrator professionalization divided schools from communities during much of the twentieth century.[2] In the past 15 to 20 years, though, there have been considerable efforts to reconnect schools and communities. At least three trends—global economic restructuring that has damaged rural communities, devolution of federal powers to states and communities, and systemic school reform—offer schools and communities opportunities to form new and renewed relationships.[3] At the same time, the practice of community development has changed. Many community development practitioners no longer bring in experts from outside the community; rather, they come to communities and listen to what residents have to say. Instead of focusing solely on problems, practitioners now examine how community assets can be used to improve the quality of life.[4]

The decline of many rural areas suggests that schools and communities need to work together for their mutual survival. Schools can offer needed leadership[5] and by sharing resources, schools and communities can meet the standards of school reform while meeting the needs of community members.[6]

The Importance of Assets

A description of your community includes assets and capabilities. The task is to build on community strengths by acknowledging, documenting, and reporting these assets. Consider weaknesses as opportunities for improvement, not obstacles to success.

Creating an Asset Map

A good way to approach this task is to create an asset map that shows the resources and supports within the community on which community-in-school and school-in-community programs may be built. This allows you to take a careful look at the school-community relationship. It will give hope as community members realize just how rich their asset base is and it may reveal niches where residents (including students) can start businesses, set up service organizations, and take other measures to build school and community capacity. The following three-step exercise is intended to help you locate your community's assets, map those assets, and begin to develop school-community relationships.

Step 1. Locate the community's assets.

- Define the community's geographic boundaries.
- Identify institutions, service organizations, and businesses.
- Identify citizens groups and associations in the community.
- Identify citizens with special talents, abilities, or capacities.
- Identify other stakeholders.

Step 2. Do a visual depiction of the assets.

- Use a current local map to locate resources in relationship to each other, to families, and to the school.
- Be sure to map service categories such as child care, tutoring, cultural and natural amenities, etc.
- Assemble a directory that includes descriptions of local services and a map of community resources.
- Use the map as a way to identify challenges and opportunities.
- Use the map to help direct activities once a need or goal is identified.

Step 3. Help develop relationships, partnerships, and collaboration.

- Set up a community expo at the school for businesses and agencies, perhaps in conjunction with a school festival or parent-teacher night.
- Use athletic events to highlight local service organizations that promote academic achievement.
- Make personal contact with community members to see if they are interested in becoming involved with each other and the school.
- Promote the school as a location for meetings of community groups with common interests.
- Open the school library and computer facilities to public use.

Presented here are three different ways to approach community asset mapping: (1) generate a community profile, (2) complete a Community Capacity Inventory, and (3) conduct a "Windshield Survey."

Data Sources

Aids to asset mapping include these:

- telephone book Yellow Pages
- chamber of commerce directory
- map of your area
- statewide business council publication
- state economic development agency phone number or Web site
- U.S. Department of Commerce
  - census data on the Web at http://www.census.gov/
  - county-level economic analysis data on the Web at http://www.bea.doc.gov/
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - agriculture and rural statistics on the Web at http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/
- reference desk at a public or college library
- school system data
- county development authority data
- public and private social service agencies
- churches
- businesses
- other community agencies and organizations

Generate A Community Profile

Community profiles help identify local assets, resources, conditions, and activities and reveal gaps, barriers, or needs. In generating a profile, you'll need to do the following:

- Collect basic information about the community, such as population, nature of households, educational attainment, ethnic characteristics, and income levels.
- Collect current information on all or selected academic areas.
- Identify existing community resources that support learning in those areas.
- Review the school improvement plan.
- Prepare a profile of school and community partnerships designed to strengthen academic learning.
- List community resource agencies that work with the school or are potential partners.

Here are some suggestions that might help you describe existing school and community characteristics related to academic achievement:

- Describe academic programs in your school, using available test scores, grade distributions, course selection booklets, and class enrollments to make your points.
- Describe the kinds of community activities that already support academic achievement in your school.
- Define how community engagement might strengthen your existing school improvement plan.
- Describe the nature of existing school-community partnerships.

All of the information collected will be useful in defining the school community. Such a definition is crucial for understanding the school's relationship to various parts of the community, for determining potential partners, and for developing strategies to reach out to the various school stakeholders.

Community Profile

Population (U.S. Census) _____

Household Type and Presence and Age of Children (U.S. Census)_____
_____

School Enrollment and Type of School (school records) _____

Educational Attainment (U.S. Census) _____

Industries (phone book, chamber of commerce)_____
_____

Types of Businesses (phone book, chamber of commerce)_____
_____

Occupations (U.S. Census, chamber of commerce)_____

Median Household Income (U.S. Census, state data center) _____

Civic Organizations (phone book, community contacts) _____

Churches/Religious Organizations (phone book, community contacts)_____
_____

Education-related organizations (phone book, community contacts)_____

Social Service Agencies (phone book, state directory) _____
_____

Technology Use in the Community (Chamber of Commerce, community contacts) _____
_____

Recreation/Leisure Time (community contacts, various agencies) _____

Other _____
_____

Define Your Community (geography, role groups, interests) _____
_____
_____

Complete a Community Capacity Inventory

It is important to view communities as a collection of assets and resources for educating children, rather than a collection of needs. Each community has a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. An inventory or a "map" of the community resources needs to be developed. Once this map has been established, it can be beneficial for two different purposes: to determine areas of opportunity and need and to move to action once a need or goal is identified.

The inventory defines six different kinds of assets: individual, institutional, federal and state, organizational, physical, and cultural. Use the list below to help you draw up a list of these assets for your community. Then you can begin a discussion of how they can be used to bolster academic achievement and how the school can help build the community's assets. Many of the individuals and organizations listed below, as well as the physical assets, can be incorporated into curricular and extracurricular activities. Your community may have additional assets not mentioned here.

- Individual Assets -
(Skills, talents, and experiences of school and community members)

- Institutional -
Hospitals
Schools
Churches
Library
College or university
Police department
Fire department
Elderly care facilities
Mental health facility

- Federal and State -
Extension Service/4-H
U.S. Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management
Small Business Administration
Agricultural Credit
Rural Development Agency
Telecommunications Agency
School Service Center
State Education Agency
Natural Resources Department
Economic Development Department
Local Development District
Military facility

- Organizational Assets -
Newspaper
Radio and TV
Utilities
Small and large businesses
Home-based enterprises
Parks/recreation areas
Religious organizations
Cooperatives
Cable company
Business associations
Citizen groups

- Physical Assets -
Lakes, ponds
Vacant land
Industrial structures
Energy resources
Waste resources
Natural sites
Agriculture
Mining
Forest

- Cultural Assets -
Historic/Arts groups
Ethnic/Racial diversity/heritage
Crafts, other skills
Cultural organizations
Nonprofit groups

Conduct a "Windshield Survey"

Here's a tool for getting to know your school and community better. Do a "windshield survey." Drive around various areas of your community and make notes of what you see. Take a detailed area map with you to help with your note taking. This is a hunt for already known and "hidden" community assets. All of the time, you should be thinking about the school and its relationship to the community and the land it lies on. You might want to ask questions such as these:

- **Neighborhoods/people in the community**

1. How does the school district fit into the geographic area of the community?
2. How are settlements in the school community located in relationship to one another and in relationship to the school?
3. How are residents of the community spread across the land generally and in relationship to the school?
4. What are the patterns of residence based on race or ethnicity?
5. Do some areas seem poorer or richer than others?
6. Where are the churches? What are the denominations represented?
7. What types of social/service organizations are there in the community?

- **Land use**

1. Are there large pieces of land owned by government agencies or private companies?
2. Is there land that appears not to be in use?
3. Is the land flat, rolling, hilly, or mountainous?
4. Is the land bare, covered with grass, covered with trees, in crops, in pasture, etc.?
5. Is there evidence of mining, now or in the past?
6. Where are other facilities, such as social service agencies, churches, and libraries, located in relationship to the school?
7. Are there serviceable vacant buildings?
8. Are there unsafe vacant buildings?

- **Education/historical/cultural features**

1. What historic sites are there in the community?
2. Are there historic buildings or unusual architectural features?
3. Does the community have any resident artists, musicians, craftspeople, and the like?
4. What about museums?
5. Is there a higher education facility, such as a community college or college, nearby?
6. Are there private schools in the community?
7. What about vocational/job training facilities?
8. Are there any festivals/community-wide functions? Who sponsors them?

- **Natural features/recreation**

1. Are there natural or other places in the community that could be used for outdoor school laboratories?
2. What are the recreational amenities?
3. Is there potential for tourism?
4. Are there any unusual restaurants?
5. Are there after-school activities for students?

- **Government**

1. What federal offices are located in your community?
2. What state offices are located in your community?
3. Does your school community cover more than one local government jurisdiction?
4. Where are local government offices located?
5. What about law enforcement?
6. Are there service or internship opportunities available with government agencies?

- **Health/human services**

1. Is there a clinic or hospital in the community?
2. What about physicians' or dentists' offices?
3. Are there mental health/drug rehabilitation facilities?
4. Where are the facilities for occupational therapy?
5. What type of care is there for the elderly?
6. Are there organizations that help the poor and welfare recipients?
7. Is there a shelter for abused spouses, the homeless, etc.?
8. Are there organizations to help strengthen families?
9. Are there service or internship opportunities available with health/human services organizations?

- **Business/economy/employment**

1. Where are businesses located in relationship to the school?
2. What kinds of businesses are there? Remember to consider both profit and nonprofit businesses.
3. What kinds of work/internship/service opportunities are there for students?
4. What kinds of businesses are missing?
5. What kinds of businesses could students start in the community that would fill an empty niche?
6. Are there opportunities to market agricultural products or crafts?
7. How could existing businesses be enlisted to help the school?
8. If there are relatively few businesses, where do people work?
9. Are there places where students could participate in voluntary activities?
10. What opportunities are there for entrepreneurship training?

- **Media**

1. Where are newspapers located in relationship to the community?
2. Where do radio and television service originate?
3. What other media are available?
4. Are there public access points/channels?

- **Technology**

1. Where are the points of public access to computers, the Internet, etc.?
2. Are there facilities where the public can be trained/mentored?
3. Is anyone already using the Internet for marketing and business?

- **Housing**

1. How old are the houses?
2. What is the condition of housing in different areas?
3. Are there agencies to rebuild/restore housing stock?
4. Where is new housing being built?

- **Transportation**

1. What is the condition of roads and bridges?
2. How difficult is it to drive a school bus on the roads?
3. What types of traffic hazards are there?
4. How hard is it to get to school or work from certain places?

As an alternative exercise, put yourselves in the shoes of students. Hop on a school bus and follow the daily route, stopping at all of the stops. Consider asking the questions suggested above along the way. Consider some other questions: How long does it take to get from one end of the route to the other? Does the distance from the school pose problems for students who must ride the route every school day? Does distance from the school have anything to do with getting and keeping people from the community involved in the school?

Another idea: Take along some people from the community who have expertise and who can help give richer information for your windshield tour. These might include the school superintendent, a county extension agent, a social worker, a law enforcement officer, a member of the clergy, a community activist, a highway engineer, or a county official. Let them tell you about different areas of the county, who lives there, and the types of problems these residents encounter in their daily lives.

Other Resources

Cooperative Extension Service, local county agent
Land Grant Universities (Colleges of Agriculture) can offer assistance in doing asset mapping.

Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University
The institute has several relevant on-line publications that can be downloaded at http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications

John P. Kretzman & John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, 1993. Order from Acta Publications, 4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640. Phone: 800-397-2282 or 773-271-1030.

Notes

1. T. N. Carver, "The Organization of a Rural Community," in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture*, 1914 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1915), 89-138; Alvin Dille, "The Reorganization of the Country School," in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture*, 1919 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1920), 289-306; and Bruce Miller, *The Role of Rural Schools in Rural Community Development* ERIC Digest EDO-RC-95-3 (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995).

2. Jim Fanning, *Rural School Consolidation and Student Learning*, ERIC Digest EDO-RC-95-4 (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995); Jonathon P. Sher, & Rachel B. Tompkins, "Economic Efficiency and Equality: The Myths of Rural School Economy and District Consolidation" in *Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of the Conventional Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 43-77; and Timothy Collins, *Crucial Policy Links: Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Chicago, IL, August 4-8, 1999.

3. See note 2 above (Timothy Collins, *Crucial Policy Links: Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment*, 1999).

4. John P. Kretzman & John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993).

5. American Association of School Administrators, *Conservation Education in American Schools: Twenty-ninth Yearbook*. (Washington, DC: American Association of School Administrators, 1951).

6. See note 3 above.

Resource

Rural School Administrator's

Community Engagement: An Inventory

Community Engagement: An Inventory

In an era of limited resources and rising expectations, public schools can find themselves competing for allocations from a shrinking pool of resources. Some constituencies have become more and more reluctant to tax themselves for schools that the public sometimes perceives to be remote and removed from day-to-day living. When only 30 percent of the adult population in a typical community has school-age children, 70 percent of the potential voters may question cost-benefit ratios at tax time and frequently refuse to bear an additional financial burden for the schools.[1] Schools need to build a broad-based community constituency that feels pride for and ownership in their schools. Local citizens may need to be reminded that rural schools and communities sustain one another in many ways, including socially, culturally, and economically. Schools may be the most vital institution remaining in rural communities.[2] Though there is not sufficient research to show that community engagement, per se, improves student achievement, the link between rural schools and communities is already well established as an ideal that includes strong relationships and parent and community involvement. Below are several research findings with practical implications for community engagement:

- Thirty-five studies found that the form of parent or community involvement does not seem to be critical, so long as it is reasonably well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting.[3]
- Almost all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful of trying.[4]
- Socioeconomic status and lack of education have no effect on the willingness of parents to help their own children.[5]

Thomas Hatch writes that "beyond changes in curriculum or improvements in self-esteem, meaningful community engagement sets in motion a chain of events that transforms the culture of the school and, often, the community that the school serves."[6] Writing about patterns among school experiences with community engagement in 32 communities, Hatch reports some important common ingredients contributing to improved test scores:

- improving the physical conditions, resources, and participation of constituent groups around learning
- clarifying and strengthening positive attitudes and expectations among parents, teachers, and students
- expanding the depth and quality of learning experiences in which parents, teachers, and students participate[7]

David Mathews says a breakdown of the contract between the public and the public school may be one reason for the more obvious problems: dissatisfaction with the performance of the school, difficulties in communication between administrators and the public, and a lack of citizen participation.[8] It is no wonder then that reforms often fail, points out a report published by Public Agenda, when such efforts are divided within by disputes between educators and other key actors and besieged without by angry interest groups.[9]

Joyce Epstein believes that developing school, family, and community partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide families services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership with others in the community, and help teachers with their work. But the main reason to create partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later

life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and their chances for success increase.[10]

School board members and school administrators say the main benefit of stronger ties with families and communities is increased academic achievement by students. Parent and community partnerships can help to boost achievement from preschool through high school. Involved parents and the community will be more likely to support school reform efforts.[11]

The School Readiness for Community Engagement Inventory helps school administrators examine their approaches to community engagement, identify strengths and weaknesses, and generate ideas for new approaches.

The instrument is divided into five parts: family, community, school, community engagement concerns, and reflection.

The inventory can help school administrators set benchmarks to gauge the readiness of the school to involve the community. This self-assessment can be completed by the principal, or the principal may choose to involve other administrators, staff members, or the general public. Before completing the inventory, it may be helpful to describe your school's current approach to community engagement.

Selected Resources

Center On School, Family, and Community Partnerships
Joyce L. Epstein, Director
Johns Hopkins University
3003 North Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
Telephone: 410-516-8800
Internet: http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm

Located at Johns Hopkins University, the center is designed to help schools develop and maintain strong school, family, and community partnerships. It maintains a variety of resources, including videos and guides to assist individual schools and communities. In 1996, the center established the National Network of Partnership Schools. The goal is to bring together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining strong school-family-community partnerships. There is no fee to join the network, but schools, districts, and states must meet a few requirements. For more information, visit http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000.

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91
Fairfax, VA 22030
Telephone: 703-359-8973
Fax: 703-359-0972
E-Mail: ncea@ncea.com
Internet: http://www.ncea.com

The NCEA's purpose is to promote parent and community involvement in public education, form community partnerships to address community needs, and expand lifelong learning opportunities for community residents of all ages and educational backgrounds. The association provides membership services including training through workshops and conferences, technical assistance to state associations and local school districts, a monthly newsletter, a quarterly journal, and governmental and public relations services.

National Senior Service Corps
Helen Alston
Corporation for National and Community Service
1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525
Phone: 202-606-5000, ext.189
Toll Free: 800-424-8867

The National Senior Service Corps is a federally supported program that helps seniors (men and women 55 years of age and older) find opportunities for service in their home communities. Of particular interest to parents is the Foster Grandparent Program, in which seniors provide emotional support to children who have been abused and neglected, care for infants born prematurely, care for children with physical disabilities, and mentoring for troubled teens and young mothers.

Women's Educational Equity Resource Center
To receive a catalog, contact:
WEEA Education Development Center
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02158-1060
E-Mail: weeapub@edc.org
Internet: http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity/

The Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Resource Center is dedicated to reducing educational disparity for women and girls. The center disseminates materials and services at a reasonable cost to parents, educators, business leaders, and community members. WEEA's catalog of gender-free materials includes publications developed by WEEA field-based programs, ACI Publishing, the California Department of Education, Free Spirit Publishing, Gray Mill Publishing, the Organization for Equal Education of the Sexes, and Sea Press. Publications cover classroom practice, math and science education, school-to-work issues, violence prevention, teacher preparation/professional development, training resources, technology education, and students with disabilities.

Notes

1. Donna M. Schmitt and Jaclynn C. Tracy, *Gaining Support for Your School: Strategies for Community Involvement*, Road Maps to Success: The Practicing Administrator's Leadership Series (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1996). ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 396 382.

2. Timothy Collins, *Crucial Policy Links: Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Chicago, IL, August 4-8, 1999.

3. Anne T. Henderson and Nancy Berla, *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement* (Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994).

4. Joyce L. Epstein, "School/Family Community Partnerships, Caring for the Children We Share," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77: 701-12 (1995).

5. Janet Chrispeels, B. Fernandez, and J. Preston, *Home and School Partners in Student Success: A Handbook for Principals and Staff* (San Diego: San Diego City Schools, Community Relations and Integration Services Division, 1991).

6. Thomas Hatch, "How Community Action Contributes to Achievement," *Educational Leadership*, 55(8): 16 (1998).

7. See Hatch, 16-19.

8. David Mathews, *Is There a Public for Public Schools?* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 1996).

9. Steve Farkas with Jean Johnson, *Divided Within, Besieged Without: The Politics of Education in Four American School Districts* (New York: Public Agenda Foundation for Kettering Foundation, 1993).

10. See note 5 above.

11. Center on Families, Communities, and Schools and Children, *Partners in Action: A Resource Guide* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1996).

Community Engagement Inventory

Section I: ***Family***

Please check yes or no for each of the following items regarding current practices at your school.

	Yes	No
1. Parents seem to feel at home in the school.	___	___
2. Parents visit/work in the classrooms.	___	___
3. Parents are not only encouraged to volunteer in school but are also recognized for their service.	___	___
4. The school provides decision-making training for all parents involved in making decisions.	___	___
5. Policy alternatives are presented to parents as part of a community meeting.	___	___
6. Planning alternatives are presented to parents as part of a community meeting.	___	___
7. The school's mission statement is shared with parents.	___	___
8. There is a high rate of parent attendance at school meetings/conferences on academic matters.	___	___
9. There is a high rate of parent attendance at nonacademic school functions.	___	___
10. The schedule of conferences and other events has been altered to meet the needs of working parents.	___	___
11. The school welcomes active participation of parents in helping children make efforts to achieve.	___	___
12. The school recruits parents to be actively involved in educating students.	___	___
13. The school involves parents as volunteers to assist students who are struggling academically.	___	___
14. The school conducts workshops to teach parents how to assist with their child's education.	___	___

	Yes	No
15. The school has developed home-school collaboration in which parents are partners in education.	___	___
16. The school provides an open forum for parents to provide input on issues.	___	___
17. The school invests time in parent and adult education.	___	___
18. Parent suggestions are carefully weighed, considered, and implemented.	___	___
19. Home-school communication is a top priority of the school.	___	___
20. Parents of all new students are invited to an informal get-acquainted meeting.	___	___
21. Parents and teachers have an opportunity to discuss problems.	___	___
22. Parents and the administration have an opportunity to discuss problems.	___	___
23. The school welcomes active participation from parents in helping children make efforts to achieve.	___	___
Parents help with the following:		
24. Selecting required textbooks	___	___
25. Selecting supplementary materials	___	___
26. Establishing course objectives	___	___
27. Determining the curriculum	___	___
28. Hiring new teachers	___	___
29. Establishing policy and procedures for evaluating teachers	___	___
30. Establishing the grading policies	___	___
31. Establishing student disciplinary policies	___	___
32. Determining budget allocation	___	___
33. Setting academic standards	___	___
34. Evaluating academic standards	___	___

Section II: ***Community***

Please check yes or no for each of the following items regarding current practices in your school and community.

	Yes	No
1. Local business leaders are involved in the classroom.	___	___
2. Local board meetings are used to recognize business leaders who help the school.	___	___
3. Local business groups are encouraged to participate with the school.	___	___
4. The school's mission statement is shared with businesses.	___	___
5. The school seeks input from businesses on skills and knowledge that may prepare students for the workplace.	___	___
6. The school encourages businesses to consider flexible work schedules for employees who are parents so they can attend conferences and other events at their children's schools.	___	___
7. The school maintains relationships with local businesses that are productive for students.	___	___
8. The school actively seeks opportunities to use local businesses as part of its curriculum.	___	___
9. Local businesses provide students with sites for work experience.	___	___
10. Local businesses help provide career guidance/counseling.	___	___
11. School staff support local businesses.	___	___
12. The school forms partnerships with businesses and other groups for civic improvement.	___	___
13. Community members are encouraged to visit the school.	___	___
14. Community members contribute to decisions made at the school.	___	___
15. The community is included in discussions of instructional issues, such as improving teaching.	___	___
16. The community has a role in formulating and assessing the mission of the school.	___	___

	Yes	No
17. The school involves community members as volunteers to assist students who are struggling academically.	___	___
18. Community members are used as resources in the classroom to supplement the teaching of different subjects.	___	___

Section III: ***School***

Please check yes or no for each of the following items regarding current practices at your school.

	Yes	No
1. The school encourages the formation of community coalitions of business leaders, parents, community organizations, and other stakeholders to be involved in total education improvement efforts.	___	___
2. School staff members are active in community affairs.	___	___
3. The school has evening activities or programs involving the entire community.	___	___
4. The school permits outside organizations to conduct community activities in the school building.	___	___
5. The school has a written, board-approved policy on school-community involvement.	___	___
6. The school has a formal improvement action plan that includes parent and community involvement strategies.	___	___
7. The school has a staff person responsible for parent-community involvement activities.	___	___
8. Efforts are made to involve all school employees in community engagement.	___	___
9. The school has identified various aspects of community relationships that enhance school quality.	___	___
10. The school has issued a report card to provide information on various aspects of the school's program.	___	___
11. The school values community members by celebrating major events in their careers and lives.	___	___
12. Faculty and staff members have friendships with members of the community.	___	___

	Yes	No
13. The principal encourages an open-door policy for face-to-face communications with community members.	___	___
14. The school office has friendly and helpful personnel.	___	___
15. The school encourages questions, problem identification, and problem solving by people affected by the system.	___	___
16. An effort to gather broad data about the community is used in establishing school goals and objectives.	___	___
17. The school actively seeks community input as to how well it's doing.	___	___
18. The school is open to activities conducted by the community.	___	___
19. The Learning Resource Center or library is designed with the community clearly in mind.	___	___
20. In the last 15 years or so, there has been a history of disagreement about school policies in the community.	___	___
21. There are times when disagreement about school policy is healthy.	___	___
22. Community involvement is essential to bridging differences in opinion about school policy.	___	___
23. Leadership in the community can come from unexpected places.	___	___
24. The community has been supportive of school policies.	___	___
25. Community groups have been instrumental in helping to raise funds for school needs.	___	___
26. Openness and trust between the school and the community are encouraged.	___	___
27. The school conducts a continuous information program for the community.	___	___
28. The school uses community members (e.g., parents, business persons) to help students understand the role of academics in the workplace.	___	___
29. The school engages community and business in helping teachers, students, and parents understand the need for high-quality knowledge and skills.	___	___

	Yes	No
30. Teaching and learning activities for students are not limited to the classroom, but are frequently held in various places around the community.	___	___

Section IV: ***Community Engagement Concerns***

Please check yes if the item is a concern or check no if it is not a concern with regard to current practices at your school.

	Yes	No
1. Parents' lack of interest in being involved	___	___
2. Staff's lack of interest in involving parents	___	___
3. Staff attitudes toward parents that discourage parent involvement	___	___
4. Communicating with parents	___	___
5. Finding good ideas others have used to get parents involved	___	___
6. Making parents understand they are welcome at school	___	___
7. Motivating parents to get involved	___	___
8. Preventing parent involvement from becoming parent interference	___	___
9. Encouraging parents to help children learn at home	___	___
10. Finding ways to use parents as learning resources for our school	___	___
11. Finding adequate funding to support parent involvement efforts	___	___
12. Getting information home to parents	___	___
13. Reaching hard-to-reach parents	___	___
14. Surveying parents to learn their attitudes and concerns	___	___
15. Convincing parents that schools truly care about them and want to help their children	___	___
16. Helping parent groups succeed	___	___

	Yes	No
17. Teaching parenting skills	___	___
18. The changing structure of the family	___	___
19. Getting parents to understand that they are their children's first and most influential teachers	___	___
20. Building a feeling of home-school teamwork	___	___
21. Parents' lack of time to devote to school	___	___

Section V: Reflection

Take some time to review your answers to the statements above, keeping in mind how you first described your current approach to community engagement in your school. Some questions you might want to consider are these:

- How satisfied are you with your current efforts at community engagement?
- Do the questions/statements suggest ideas for ways to become more involved in community engagement?
- Do your answers suggest areas where you would like to begin to devote more energy to community engagement?

Resource

Rural School Administrator's

Creating Safer Rural Schools: Involving the Community

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

AEL

Creating Safer Rural Schools: Involving the Community

Most people, until recently, thought that school violence was strictly an inner-city problem, but recent shootings of teachers and students in rural schools has focused attention on safety issues in rural settings. Schools in any setting are vulnerable, but rural schools can be especially difficult to protect for a variety of reasons. Isolated locations and longer distances from law enforcement organizations can make rural schools more vulnerable; distances from emergency support services can be an increased challenge in crisis situations.[1]

The roots of school violence are not found only in schools. Many factors contribute to school violence. A recent report from SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) cites four main groups of risk factors:

1. **Community risk factors**—these include the presence of weapons and a "cycle of disadvantage" (including poverty, teen pregnancy, drugs, and school drop-out rates) in the community.

2. **Family risk factors**—these include issues related to family composition and functioning.

3. **Individual and peer risk factors**—these include aggressive personalities or bullies, the presence of gangs, and the presence of drugs.

4. **School risk factors**—these include problematic school policies and procedures and uneven enforcement of policies.[2]

Though schools do not have control over risk factors outside the school, they can work to mediate risk factors when they are present. Schools can also develop programs to ensure they provide safe, structured learning environments.

Although violence cannot be entirely eliminated, much can be done to discourage its presence in rural school settings. Advance thinking and planning can help to prevent tragedies, ensure quicker response time in the event of a problem, and reduce the harm inflicted. The previously mentioned report from SERVE states the following:

> A safe environment comes from the establishment of a framework that includes prevention, a comprehensive safety and crisis plan, and the combined efforts of everyone at the school as well as families and the community.[3]

The guidelines and checklists included here focus on how rural schools can design a comprehensive violence prevention and preparedness program that draws on community strengths. The guidelines fall into four areas: (1) creating a community team, (2) identifying areas for action inside the school, (3) identifying areas for action on the school campus, and (4) planning for a crisis.

Creating a Community Team

Because safe school settings are the responsibility of everyone in the community, a good strategy is to create a community team. Including parents, educators, students, professionals, and others can make the team more effective and help community members feel that they have some "ownership" of the problem.[4] When schools are safe havens, they can be community centers. The bridge building that can take place around the safety issue could serve to strengthen the community as a whole.[5]

A community team can carry out the following activities:

- Review the campus and school for potential safety issues.
- Discuss policy decisions around key issues.
- Plan services and support for school safety.
- Develop a crisis plan to prepare for unforeseen events.
- Become a vital communications link between the school and the greater community.

In forming a school safety team, it is best to plan for the participation of a dozen or so people. Include representatives from the following groups:

- ***Local law enforcement and emergency medical services personnel.*** Their authority, knowledge, and crisis planning must dovetail into the school's prevention and crisis planning.

- ***Secondary-level students.*** Student leaders hold unique insights and are part of the campus grapevine. Linkages between students and school leaders have proven to be an important resource for learning about and intercepting weapons that are brought to school.[6]

- ***Community leaders.*** Is there a service club, business, or industry that would send a person to be part of this team? These community members might offer insights into how to obtain extra funding to support school safety.

- ***Parents.*** Select one or two parents who can deal with school safety planning issues confidentially while establishing communication links to other parents and the community at large.

- ***School faculty and leadership.*** The team needs school representation that is three or four levels deep. Crises do not necessarily occur when the principal is in the building. Other people within the school need to know quick emergency response procedures. This is an opportunity to recognize and foster teacher leadership. Teachers need regular, accurate information about school safety plans to feel confident in case of a crisis. Their team representation is important as a communications link.[7]

- ***School staff.*** The school secretary and a custodian are vital team members. They are often the first to encounter potentially volatile situations, and their awareness and attitude are often instrumental in minimizing damage from a negative situation.

- ***School central office.*** Your school district's central office might have someone who coordinates the school planning with a district plan. Coordination of plans is essential to developing clear responses.

- ***Counselors.*** A person with counseling expertise is needed for this team. In rural areas, this person will need to be a part of a larger regional crisis counseling team. In a crisis, many counselors may be needed, and qualified persons should be on call. This requires clear advance coordination and possibly additional training in grief counseling.[8]

The community team should have the following:

- a dedicated, skilled, and organized team leader
- the support of the school leadership
- the support of the community
- enough resources (both time and funds) to do a good job

Without strong leadership and community support, the team will not be productive. Without the support of the school leadership, school safety cannot be addressed adequately, and necessary changes are unlikely to occur. If parents and community members do not feel like they are included or respected, they may not support the actions of the team.

Identifying Areas for Action: Inside the School

After the community team has formed, it must meet to consider the issues. Basic school data should be assessed to gather a comprehensive picture of school security. Research indicates that the following school factors are often predictive of school violence:

- vandalism of school grounds
- low graduation rates
- high numbers of suspensions
- high student and teacher absentee rates
- high teenage pregnancy rates
- student drug problems[9]

The team should consider adopting policies and procedures that can reduce the risk of school violence. Research suggests that traditional approaches to school violence, such as punishment after the fact, only address negative behavior, not its causes. Comprehensive policies

are needed both to improve school climate and to deal with problems when they occur. Successful approaches usually address particular risk factors but also involve proactive measures that protect all children. School policies can be adopted to effectively deal with small infractions before they create larger problems, but they can also be designed to prevent some problems from occurring.[10] Checklist A, "School Policies and Procedures to Prevent School Violence," is designed to help team members identify strengths and weaknesses in the current school policies.

Identifying Areas for Action: The School Campus

While the most effective violence prevention strategies usually take place within the school, it is helpful to understand the school physical plant and to identify areas for improvement.

Checklist B, "Proactive School Safety: The School Physical Plant," guides team members to observe four critical areas of the school building and grounds. This checklist includes questions to consider, and its use can lead community team members to discuss possible changes to the school campus.

Planning for a Crisis

Schools need to have a plan for addressing crises. The purpose of this plan is to identify specific procedures to follow if a crisis occurs and to specify the responsibilities of team and school members. Planning provides an opportunity to anticipate and consider response plans for various scenarios. The coordination of emergency support services and police help are critical aspects of this plan, especially for schools located in remote areas. This plan can also consider emergencies such as a fire or tornado or accidents such as a chemical spill or an airplane crash.

Books to Read

We recommend two resources to help you develop a crisis plan:

1. Robert Decker. *When a Crisis Hits: Will Your School Be Ready?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1997.

2. Stephanie Kadel and Joseph Follman. *Reducing School Violence*. Greensboro, NC: SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, 1993.

Notes

1. G. Petersen, C. Beekley, K. Speaker, and D. Pietzrak, "An Examination of Violence in Three Rural School Districts," *Rural Educator*, 19(3): 25-32 (1997).

2. S. Kadel, J. Watkins, J. Follman, and C. Hammond, *Reducing School Violence: Building a Framework for School Safety*, 3rd ed. (Greensboro, NC: The Regional Educational Lab at SERVE, 1999).

3. See note 2 above.

4. Council of Chief State School Officers, "A Concern about . . . School Community Partnerships to Prevent Violence," *Concerns* (June 1995); and S. Gregg, *School-Based Programs to Promote Safety and Civility* (Charleston, WV: AEL, Inc., 1998).

5. A. B. Miller, *The Role of Rural Schools in Rural Community Development* (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995).

6. M. S. Hill, "Making Students Part of the Safe Schools Solution," NASP Bulletin 80(579): 24-30 (April 1996).

7. W. Schwarz, *An Overview of Strategies to Reduce School Violence* (New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 1996).

8. B. Collison, S. Bowden, M. Patterson, J. Snyder, S. Sandall, and P. Wellman, *Journal of Counseling and Development* 65: 389-390 (1987).

9. See note 2 above; and J. Richardson, "Translating School Improvement into Numbers," *School Team Innovator* (February 1997): 3-4.

10. See note 2 above.

Checklist A
School Policies and Procedures to Prevent School Violence

1. ___ Does the school have a discipline code that clearly identifies school rules and acceptable student behaviors?

2. ___ Does the school have a weapons policy?

3. ___ Do current school policies express zero tolerance for bullying and other aggressive behaviors?

4. ___ Are current school policies consistently enforced?

5. ___ Are current school policies evenly enforced?

6. ___ Do students believe that current school policies are fairly enforced, with no group singled out for aggressive enforcement?

7. ___ Does the school code of conduct clearly define the roles, rights, and responsibilities of all persons involved in the school setting, including students, teachers, administrators, and support staff, as well as parents and police?

8. ___ Does the school provide a system of rewards for positive behavior?

9. ___ Does the school code of conduct provide a procedure for student appeals?

10. ___ Does the school have a strong leader?

    ___ The principal maintains a high profile in the school.
    ___ The principal maintains individual and group contact with students.
    ___ The principal walks the halls and school grounds regularly.
    ___ The principal frequently visits classrooms.
    ___ The principal is accessible to teachers and parents.
    ___ The principal works to create a positive school climate.

11. ___ Does the school provide staff development opportunities addressing school violence?

    ___ The school has workshops on school violence prevention strategies.
    ___ Teachers have the chance to be trained in dispute resolution and mediation.
    ___ Teachers are trained to recognize warning signs of violence.

12. ___ Does the school offer forums for students to discuss school violence issues?

13. ___ Has the school considered ways to involve students and parents in violence prevention?

14. ___ Does the school work to teach children about the nature and extent of violence in society and its implications?

15. ___ Does the school work to prevent hate crimes by educating students about negative stereotypes?

Checklist B

Proactive Safe School Survey: The School Physical Plant

Areas to Consider	Comments and Ideas
I. The Campus Perimeter	
Are fences or surveillance cameras needed?	
If there are fences, are they in good repair?	
Does landscaping need to be trimmed or removed to eliminate hiding places?	
Is lighting adequate for evening security?	
II. The Campus Entrance	
Is a gate needed?	
Is a gate guard necessary?	
Should high school students have IDs for entrance onto campus?	
What is the student auto policy and does it contribute to the school safety plan?	
Are decals needed for staff and high school student vehicles?	
Should parking spaces be assigned for easy identification?	
Is the parking lot randomly surveyed by assigned personnel?	
Are speed bumps needed to slow traffic?	
Is vehicle traffic routed so that exiting and entering is at a low speed?	
Is the parking lot and vehicle access far enough from school buildings?	
Is there a marked area for emergency vehicles?	

III. The School Entrance

Are the number of entrances minimized? _____

Do more secluded entrances and other blind spots such as stairwells need surveillance cameras? _____

Are metal detectors or wands needed? _____

Do signs assist visitors in finding the main school entrance? _____

Are badges available for visitors to be identified in the building? _____

IV. The School Building

Are trash dumpsters, spouting, or other things arranged to make access to the roof of the building difficult? _____

Are electrical panels, main shutoff switches and valves, storage areas, and other facility supports adequately secured and yet accessible to authorized individuals? _____

Is lighting adequate in all areas during the day and for night security? _____

Are areas with less traffic flow such as the stage secured when not in use? _____

Can larger populated areas such as the cafeteria be evacuated easily? _____

Do all windows have curtains so that rooms cannot be viewed from the outside if necessary? _____

Can all classrooms be locked? _____

Do all classrooms have a communications link to the main office via a public address system, telephone, or computer? _____

Resource

Rural School Administrator's

Rural School Facilities Planning Process: A Checklist

Rural School Facilities Planning Process: A Checklist

The physical condition of schools makes a difference in student achievement. Students do better when their schools are not in disrepair. Today, nearly 60% of all U.S. schools are nearing the end of their projected life expectancy. Nearly half of the nation's schools are in rural areas, where school buildings frequently double as community centers, hosting sports events, plays, and other social events. It is important that school facilities are welcoming to all who use them. Communities that feel served and welcomed by their schools are more likely to support them.

Before rural schools begin planning facility improvements, however, planners should collect information that will help them accurately assess existing resources. For example, vital information can be derived from an up-to-date report that details the improvements needed to bring buildings into compliance with state building codes. There are other issues to consider as well when designing or upgrading a school. Planners must consider how to accommodate new curriculum designs, technology upgrades, projected fluctuations in enrollment, accessibility issues, and extracurricular use. A small or dwindling tax base may require that planners think boldly and creatively about new ways of financing both repair and construction. Decisions about school size, use of valuable space, and serving community needs are best grounded in reality, informed by research, and fueled by the creative thinking of community members.

Included here are a list of key resources and organizations that are especially relevant for rural school planners as well as a checklist to help begin the planning process.

The checklist focuses on three aspects of the facilities planning process:

1. collecting vital information before planning begins
2. designing a rural school to accommodate modern curricular and extracurricular activities
3. designing rural school facilities to help community members feel welcome and valued

Resources for Rural Schools and Communities

Many resources exist to help rural communities, schools, and districts effectively plan new or improved school facilities. Although our search revealed no handbook or manual dealing specifically with creating the small, rural community school facility, the handbook listed below (*Sustainable Small Schools*) provides food for thought and contains an especially timely discussion of school size and "economy of scale" issues.

Both the Council of Educational Facilities Planners International and the National School Boards Association serve rural constituents and are available to provide appropriate referrals and information. The other listed organizations are devoted to rural issues but may not have a particular familiarity with facilities issues. AEL's ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools can provide focused literature searches on the topic of rural school facilities.

Books to Read

Howley, C., and J. Eckman. *Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996.

Discusses community as focus of instruction, summarizes related school-size literature, describes options, and lists resources. Designed specifically for community audiences and local educators. Practical rather than scholarly treatment, but pays careful attention to extant literature.

Stockard, J., and M. Mayberry. *Effective Educational Environments*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, 1992. Also available on ERIC microfiche: ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 271 832.

In-depth review of how major features of school environments affect learning. Chapters Three and Four specifically focus on the physical environment (facilities, classrooms, size) and community (consolidation, new construction, policy). The entire work is coherent and well-argued. Scholarly treatment, but very readable; 400 references.

Dewees, Sarah, and P. Cahape-Hammer, eds. *Improving Rural School Facilities: Design, Construction, Finance, and Public Support*. Charleston, WV: AEL, Inc., in press.

Organizations to Contact

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
Contact: Robert Hagerman
Toll-free: 800-624-9120
Fax: 304-347-0487
E-mail: ericrc@ael.org
Web: http://www.ael.org/eric/

Major connection to the professional literature on rural education and small schools and contributor to the ERIC database. Provides information on small schools, rural education, free searches of the database, and publications (some free, some low-cost).

National Rural Education Association
230 Education Building
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1588
Contact: Joe Newlin, executive director
Voice: 970-491-7022
Fax: 970-491-1317
Web: http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/NREA

Oldest unified voice for rural education in the United States. National advocate for rural schools and programs. Publications include a journal, *The Rural Educator*. Program of endorsed rural education research centers.

The Rural Challenge
P. O. Box 1569
Granby, CO 80446
Voice: 970-887-1064
Web: http://www.ruralchallenge.org/

Mission: "to support, where they already exist, and to encourage, where they do not, genuinely good, genuinely rural schools"; three major thrusts: grants, policy, and public engagement.

Checklist
The Rural School Facility Planning Process

I. Information in Forming the Planning Process

This section of the checklist focuses on information that should be collected before planning begins.

1. Are there recent studies that have been completed regarding what improvements need to be made to bring the building into compliance with state school building codes?
___Yes ___No

2. Are these reports available for review?
___Yes ___No

Please list reports:

_____

_____

3. Are the reports and recommendations still relevant?
___Yes ___No

3a. If you checked "no" for any of the first three items, list the action you must take to secure the needed information:_____

_____

4. Are there local government resources available for facility construction, renovation, or repair?
___Yes ___No

5. Are there state resources available for facility construction, renovation, or repair?
___Yes ___No

6. Are there federal resources available for facility construction, renovation, or repair?
___Yes ___No

7. To what extent has the local community been supportive of raising funds for school facility issues in the past?
___not at all ___somewhat ___very supportive

8. To what extent is enrollment exceeding prescribed facility capacity?
___not at all ___somewhat ___very much

9. To what extent is student achievement meeting community standards?
___not at all ___somewhat ___very much

II. Curricular and Extracurricular Issues

The goal of this section is to prompt thinking about the way a school facility can be designed to meet the demand for high-quality curricular and extracurricular activities. This section also covers some basic issues in rural facilities development, such as planning for flexibility and accessibility.

Place a checkmark next to each statement that is true for your planned school.

Curricular Activities

____ The school facility provides enough space for the size of our current student body.

____ The school facility provides enough space to accommodate the expected enrollment 5 to 10 years from now.

____ The school facility accommodates laboratory classroom learning in key subject areas.

- ____ science
- ____ art
- ____ computers
- ____ agriculture
- ____ child development
- ____ commercial foods
- ____ auto mechanics
- ____ other

____ The school facility accommodates state-of-the-art computer technology.

- ____ computer lab space for teachers and students
- ____ computer lab space that can accommodate community users
- ____ wiring infrastructure
- ____ computer lab space can accommodate technology upgrades and changes

____ The school facility can accommodate a modern library/media center.

____ The school facility's library space has space for

- ____ a main reading area
- ____ an audio/visual area
- ____ independent study spaces
- ____ office space
- ____ workrooms
- ____ storage

____ The school facility can accommodate the technology needs of a modern media center, including the following:

- ____ audiovisual equipment
- ____ computers for Internet access
- ____ multimedia presentation centers
- ____ a video classroom for distance learning
- ____ proper ventilation and climate control for heat-producing equipment such as computers and projectors

Extracurricular Activities

____ The school has adequate sports facilities
- ____ football and soccer
- ____ basketball
- ____ softball/baseball
- ____ track
- ____ gymnastics
- ____ other

____ The school has adequate music rooms
- ____ with sound risers
- ____ with soundproofing
- ____ with pianos and other instruments

____ The school has a theater for school plays and concerts
- ____ with sound risers
- ____ with soundproofing
- ____ with adequate seating
- ____ with adequate lighting
- ____ with a catwalk
- ____ with a control booth

____ The school has an adequate art space
- ____ with tables
- ____ with tile floors
- ____ with display areas
- ____ with plumbing
- ____ with storage areas
- ____ with appropriate lighting

Accessibility

____ The school facility is fully in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- ____ access ramps
- ____ railings
- ____ elevators
- ____ movable seats on stairwells
- ____ accessible water fountains
- ____ accessible bathrooms
- ____ automatic doors
- ____ doors wide enough for wheelchairs

Flexibility

____ New facilities are designed for flexibility
- ____ modular classrooms
- ____ designed to accommodate changes in technology

____ New facilities will be able to accommodate increased enrollment

____ New facilities are designed with a 30-year demographic horizon in mind

III. Community Issues

This section of the checklist focuses on school design issues related to making community members feel welcome and respected by the school.

Place a checkmark next to each statement that is true for your planned school.

Community Engagement

____ The design of the school facility encourages community engagement.

____ Parking areas and the school entrance are welcoming to community members.

____ Visitor spots are clearly marked in the school parking lot.

____ Directions for visitors are clearly posted at the school.

____ The school helps provide the community with access to communications technology.

- ____ The facility provides public access to computers for Internet access and other use.
- ____ The facility provides public access to the school library and media center.
- ____ The learning resource center/library is designed with the community clearly in mind.

____ The facility includes such areas as meeting rooms—separate from areas used by students—available to community members during the regular school day.

____ The school helps meet the leisure, recreation, and wellness needs of the community.

____ The school maintains relationships with local small businesses.

____ The location of the facility encourages use by the community.

____ The school is located within convenient driving distance of those it serves—students and community members.

____ Transportation arrangements allow all students to participate in extracurricular activities.

____ The school is, or will be, small enough to serve its students and community well.

Community Involvement

____ The community is involved in planning new facility upgrades or construction.

____ Educators, community members, and students work together to identify needs for any new construction or renovation.

____ Community "ownership" is secured before the local board of education approves new construction.

____ Educators, community members, and students work together to design new construction (and to realize the learning potential of their mutual work).

____ Participation in facility planning and design processes includes community members from all geographic areas, income levels, and ethnic groups, including those who do not currently have children in school.

____ Construction plans consider local construction firms for the school construction.

____ Construction plans include provision for skilled community volunteers to help construct new facilities.

____ When planning new schools, educators, community members, and students together visit rural community schools located elsewhere to get ideas for building the new community school.

____ The architect being considered by the school board is experienced in designing facilities that foster healthy relationships between a school and its rural community.